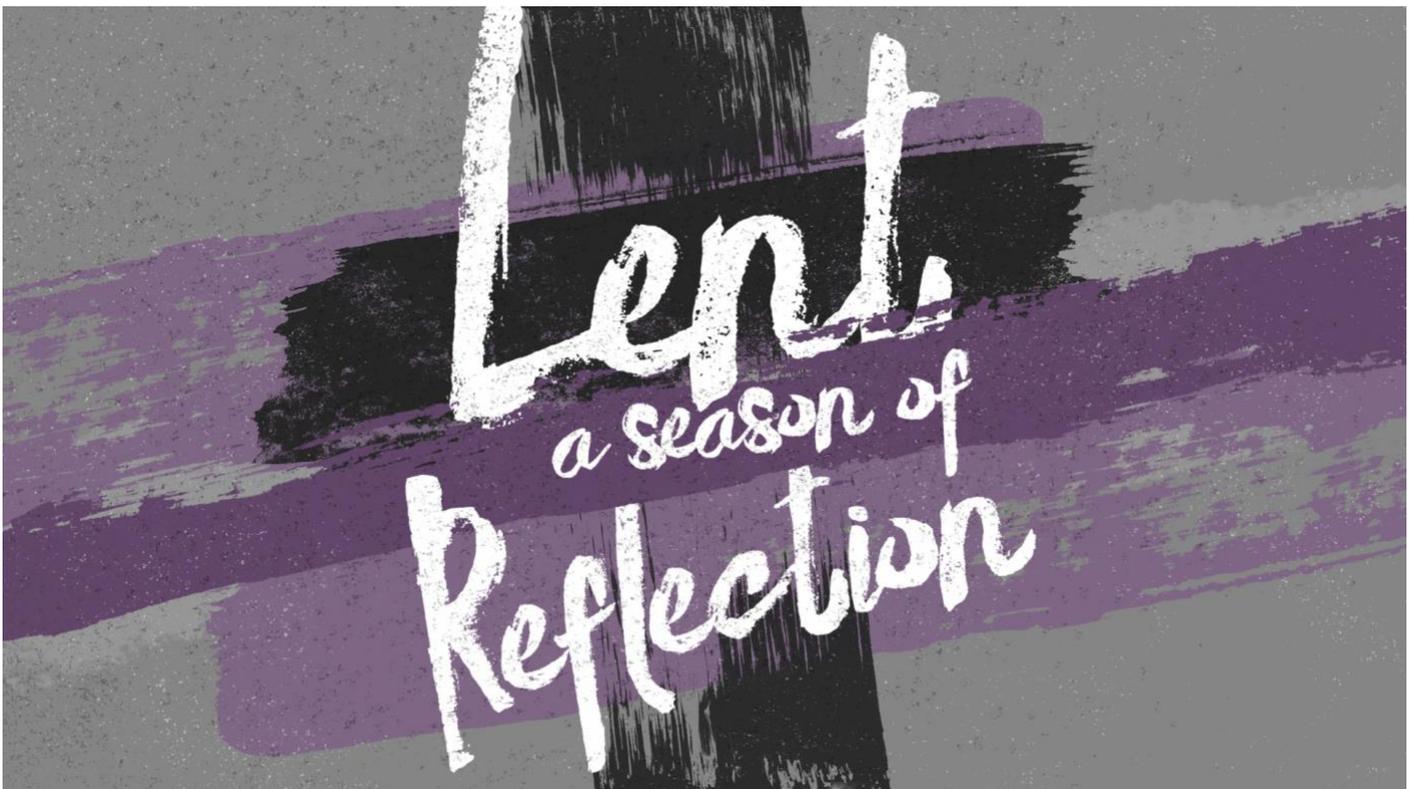


## Lenten Guide 2021



Lent is a time to die to sin and to the power it holds in our lives and to continually turn to the transformative work of God in our lives. Lent is a time to narrow the focus of the Church to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The season of Lent marks the forty days from Ash Wednesday to Easter (Sundays are not included).

There are many 40 day journeys in the Bible; when Moses went to Mount Sinai to receive the Law (Exodus 24:12-18), Elijah's journey to Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:1-12) and of course Jesus' journey in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:9-12, Luke 4:1-13). Lent is a time that reflects Jesus' journey in the wilderness, where he fasted, prayed and prepared for what was ahead.

Fasting and prayer are important disciplines for the Lenten journey. Below are some resources for us a community to help us connect with God during this time.

## Fasting

Fasting in its most basic definition is giving something up in order to focus on God. What you give up should be something that requires effort on your part, a sacrifice. That sacrifice changes our normal routine and pattern and creates an opportunity to focus on God, perhaps in a new way. Fasting results in our being more attentive to God and the things of God. The discipline of fasting is one that God can use to draw us closer to Himself.

Join us as a Community as we partake in fasting during Lent (February 14 – March 31) We are encouraging the whole body to take up fasting as we look toward Easter.

### Fasting and Prayer go together

The disciplines of fasting and prayer are all about focusing on God. In his book “Celebration of Discipline”, Richard Foster notes: “Fasting must forever center on God ... [other reasons] must never replace God as the center of fasting.” Prayer also centers on God. Dr. Bob Bakke declares, “The purpose of prayer is union with God ... the essence of prayer is not to get things but to get God.” Prayer and fasting went hand in hand for Jesus and his disciples and they go hand in hand for us today.

### Types of Fasting

This year as a church we are suggesting a weekly fast schedule (see details on the next page). You may choose to fast from one item for the entirety of Lent or you may wish to have a different focus each week. Additionally, you may consider the possibility of building each week upon the next. For instance, you could continue the Week 1 Fast into Week 2 and so forth to eventually do all seven fasts together. Again, this is not intended to be a burden, but rather an opportunity, and should be stewarded as circumstances allow.

If we are to follow Christ in the wilderness, it will take some degree of discomfort and inconvenience. May we begin to prepare our hearts accordingly.

You may want to choose your own fasting items instead of following the weekly schedule. Ask God to reveal some things in your life that you can “give-up” during Lent. As we throw off that which slows us down, we will find ourselves able to spend more time in God’s presence, listening to His Word, and being equipped to persevere.

What is difficult for one person to abstain from may be easy for someone else. Remember that fasting is a personal thing between you and God, so consider carefully what would be difficult for you to give up. If it's difficult for you to do then this is probably the best thing to give up!

### Weekly Fast Schedule

**Week 1:** Food. You may choose to fast from one meal a day; others will do an entire day; others still might choose a fast of multiple days. *Fasting from food will not be appropriate or medically advisable for some - e.g. pregnant or nursing moms, those with certain medical conditions or eating disorders and children.*

**Week 2:** Television and Movies. This would include a fast of television, movies, Netflix and the like.

**Week 3:** Social Media and the Internet. This would include Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and surfing the Internet.

**Week 4:** Caffeine, Sweets and Alcohol. Remember that you may experience withdrawals when fasting from these items.

**Week 5:** Non-Essential use of Mobile Phone. This involves only using your phone for it's essential needs (work, emergencies, etc.).

**Week 6:** Shopping for Non-Essentials. This includes internet shopping as well!

**Week 7:** Busyness. Create space in your schedule for daily time with God, consider using the ONE plan as we go through Mark and Romans, set time aside to serve others, extend hospitality as you are able during this Covid season and attend Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services.

## Plan Your Fast

- Consider Your Schedule

While a fast, by nature, is inconvenient, it should be an inconvenience to you—not to those around you. If you are fasting from food, be aware of meetings and gatherings where food will be present. You may want to avoid making lunch appointments on your fast day!

- Tell Only the People You Must

It's a good idea to tell as few people as possible about your fast. Most won't understand. Fasting can also become a source of pride and boasting as you spread the news to more and more people.

- Beware of Your Emotions

Some people experience vast mood swings during a fast. One moment they are totally focused on God and the next they are distracted and grumpy. Knowing that this is likely to happen will help you react properly. Learning to refocus on God and His goodness during this tough emotional time will help when your fast is over and you experience similar emotions. You may also experience withdrawal as you fast, be aware of headaches and other symptoms.

- Be Still and Focus on God

Fasting provides extra time to read God's word and pray. Take a break or several breaks throughout the day, when you would normally eat or take part in the activity you are giving up. Make use of the Daily Bible Reading Plan during your fast. Prayer always accompanied fasting for Jesus and his disciples. Spend time talking with God and allowing him to reveal Himself to you in His Word.

You may not sense the effect of your time of fasting right away. Closeness to God or an answer to prayer might seem delayed. Stay encouraged. Learn as much as you can about God and how much you matter to Him. Believe that "Those who wait on the Lord- WILL renew their strength" -Isaiah 40:31

- Breaking the fast

You'll want to break your fast carefully, especially if you choose to fast from food for multiple days. If you haven't eaten for a while then be careful not to eat too much to begin with, as this can be a shock to your system. This is especially true for long fasts (three days or more), where eating needs to be re-introduced gradually.

## Fasting in Scripture

Fasting is found throughout Scripture. Here are just some of the references you can look up for further study.

- God describes True Fasting - Isaiah 58
- Worship/Prayer and Fasting - Luke 2:37, Acts 13:2, Ezra 8:23,
- Motives - Matthew 6:16-18
- Repentance/Grief - 1 Samuel 7:6, Joel 1:14
- Jesus fasts in the wilderness - Luke 4:1-14